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which he had collected for that purpose. Our hero, Sir Gideon Murray, conducted his prisoner to the castle, where his lady received him with congratulations upon his victory, and inquiries concerning the fate to which he destined his prisoner:—"The Gallows," answered Sir Gideon, for he is said already to have acquired the honour of knighthood, "to the gallows with the marauder."—"Hout na, Sir Gideon," answered the considerate matron in her vernacular idiom, "would you hang the winsome young Laird of Harden when ye have three ill-favoured daughters to marry?" "Right, right," answered the Baron who caught at the idea, "he shall either marry our daughter, mickle-mouthed Meg, or strap for it." Upon this alternative being proposed to the prisoner, he, upon the first view of the case, stoutly preferred the gibbet to "mickle-mouthed Meg," for such was the nickname of the young lady, whose real name was Agnes. But at length, when he was literally led forth to execution, and saw no other chance of escape, he retracted his ungallant resolution, and preferred the typical noose of matrimony to the literal cord of hemp. Such is the tradition established in both families, and often jocularly referred to upon the Borders. It may be necessary to add, that mickle-mouthed Meg and her husband were a very happy and loving pair, and had a very large family, to each of whom Sir WILLIAM SCOTT bequeathed good estates, besides reserving a large one for the eldest.

[London paper.]

TO THE EDITOR.

SIR, The following letters, containing remarks on the society of Edinburgh, I place at your disposal.

W. P.

Edinburgh, — 1814.

THE courts of St. James and Dresden are, I believe, the only courts in Europe, where they continue to wear upon levee days the hoop, high-heeled shoe, and if one may so say, those other remnants of the dark ages of good breeding. But it may add somewhat to the dignity of a court, if people set apart for it a dress, which upon all other occasions is now distinguished for its inconvenience and absurdity. From private society, however, such deformities were long since banished, and those unfortunate hoops, which manoeuvred so brilliantly in the time of Sir Charles Grandison, have ascended to the garret along with the methodical principles of honour and politeness which prevailed in those

days. It is probable that the French have taken many of their ideas about English manners from the writings of Richardson, for it appears from the memoirs of those times, that the enthusiasm was as great for them in France as in England, and indeed they there continue still to be much spoken of.—Here we may see the distance which the French have generally kept before the English in the progress of good breeding—that is, till the era of the revolution.⁷ It is the difference between the society of Squire Western for example—where every thing was boisterous and natural, and the society of Sir C. Grandison, where every thing was constrained and artificial.—All nations, however, get the habit some time or other of talking about the good old times of their ancestors. In England this means the times of the English squires—of ready and unbounded hospitality—when they served up “whole oxen” and “whole epicks”—oppressed you with perpetual attentions and large slices, and never esteemed the measure of their gallantry full, till they had locked the door and drank you lifeless under the table. Even to this day some of the remote Highland chieftains have a feudal custom of bringing their guests, after they have gone to bed, a large bowl of hot whiskey and sugar with their own hands, and it is really thought an affront, if one is not able, in the chieftain’s presence, to drink the whole off to the last villanous dregs. All men who have a just notion of right and wrong, will perceive this to be pure tyranny—a huge Highlander, with a two edged claymore in one hand, and a bowl of flaming, foaming whiskey in the other ;—but considering that one is safe in bed it is really better to drink the whiskey, than suffer the servitude inflicted by the stupid, formal hypocrisy of the Grandisons.

From this tyranny of unmeaning forms we were delivered more immediately by the superiour refinement of the French. Under the influence of the “*petits soupers*,” a style of society admitting of much nature, wit, and at the same time elegance, was established ; and all Europe was enchanted with the politeness of the French, not because they believed them better Christians, or more honest men, but by divesting themselves of these absurd ceremonies, they had thrown into their manners a great appearance of simplicity and benevolence without losing any thing of their grace and dignity. For the last half century these manners have been fixing themselves in the higher classes of people

in this country, and, as far as I am able to judge, I am inclined to believe that the condition of society among those ranks, is now superiour to any in the world. Mr. Eustace, the Italian traveller, who has certainly had great opportunities of making comparisons, places the standard at Vienna; but Madame de Stäel conveys rather a different impression, nor does it correspond with the idea, which we have generally been accustomed to attach to Austrian society.—The general expression of this state of society is simplicity. I do not mean the simplicity of a savage or a shepherd; nor that indifference which only modified by intercourse, assumes the shape of an officious kindness and love to all mankind. People meet together, not for the express purpose of persuading their acquaintance, that they entertain a profound regard for them, or to convince them of their infinite superiority. As for the first, they have lived long enough in the world to know the difficulty of it,—and the last is not tolerated. Whatever difference nature or situation may make in individuals, it is not prudent at first to display any excellence, which would disturb the equality of this little republick. We must not think from this that they repress every sort of distinction—or condemn to the ostracism, whatever is conspicuous for virtue or genius; they only fly away from the presumptuous man, he, who comes among them solely to seek applause, to be “*l’orateur du genre humain.*” But as to that merit, which does not force itself upon their sight, but waits to give them an opportunity of discovering it themselves, which leaves them the privilege of appreciating a man by his deserts, and not by his pretensions, it sooner or later succeeds in getting into its proper niche. We may conclude from this, that the society in Europe is a jealous and forbidding tyrant, looking with considerable coldness upon all new comers;—and so it is—and so must all society be, composed of persons of ancient families, great fortunes, and distinguished merit.

We shall see that refinement of society has in all ages kept an equal pace with the progress of women, and that it has moreover commenced every-where among literary men. Is it not then true, that refinement depends upon the cultivation of the mind, not upon the purity of the heart; and that the most accomplished society which has ever been known, is equally distinguished by a most melancholy pov-

erty of feeling and sympathy. Let us look at those countless races of people, that we jumble together under the name of the "nations of the East." From the earliest records they have permitted harems, concubinage, and other customs, by which women were deprived of their just dignity and consideration in society. Mahomet, who seems to have had some very good notions about life, treats women in the same rude and ungallant manner, and of the very few that he does admit to the green fields of Paradise—their duty there is not very celestial. Mahomet was a good statesman in prohibiting his followers from drinking intoxicating liquors in such a warm climate, but he has left one of the most brutalizing and pernicious motives as the reward of virtue. These nations had none of that refinement of society of which we are now speaking.

As to the Greeks and Romans, there appear to be no traces of it either among them. What if we read of philosophick retreats and conversations: what if they were wise, great, and learned: if their virtues were sometimes so rigid as to cease to be amiable: if they devoted their sons to death, or murdered their "benefactors" for the sake of the republick. What if their writings, paintings, statues, and publick buildings proclaim a taste and elegance, belonging apparently to the most advanced state of civilization. We can only say, that this proves no refinement of manners; and that intellectual refinement, that is, genius or excellence in any one of these arts, usually seems to precede the age of refinement of manners, to which, one would think, it ought to belong. It may be a partial explanation of this phenomenon, that genius is the gift of nature and refinement, the reward of long experience in society. To satisfy ourselves how little superiour taste, necessarily implies great civilization, we need only see those beautiful and sublime gothick buildings, scattered over Europe, but principally to be found in this country; raised during a period when nothing could be more absurd and unintelligible than to talk either of refinement of mind or manners. The Cathedral of York, so much spoken of for its symmetry, as well as the beauty and costliness of the materials, is also remarkable for the ingenuity of the workmanship. Sir Christopher Wren said of the stone roof, which is one of the most curious specimens of architecture in Europe, that if the artist would do him the favour to tell him how

he put in the centre stone, he could contrive to place all the rest. This church was built in the dark ages, though the artist might have been an Italian.

We are sufficiently informed of the laws and customs of the Athenians regarding women; and it was only courtezans who were exempted from passing the life of a sort of low, despised and disregarded nuns. As to the Romans, their satirists have left us melancholy stories of their brutal and extravagant gluttony, their mad and hateful love of publick shows, fights of gladiators and wild beasts.—The mention of the other sex is seldom made but with contempt and execration; their names are usually coupled with a detail of the most nauseous and detestable vices, which appear to be equally gross and unblushing with the Augusta, or the vilest wretch of the Lupanar.

‘Nec melior pedibus silicem qua conterit atrum;
Quam qua longorum vehitur cervice Syrorum.’

No wonder Metellus declared to the Roman people in a publick oration that woman was a very ‘troublesome companion, and he could recommend matrimony only as the sacrifice of private pleasure to publick duty.’ And no wonder the Roman senate permitted Caligula to make his horse a consul, when about the same time they passed a decree, devoting to the infernal gods the head of the first female, who should dare to interfere in the concerns of the state.

Is it then only among *Christian* nations that women first felt and exerted their proper influence? Is this the only religion where we can behold Mary the ‘mother of Jesus,’ and ‘Mary of Magdalen’ kneeling at the foot of the cross, exhibiting the true charm of their character, and associating themselves as the companions and friends of the Saviour? It is true that the spirit with which the Author of our religion lived and died, was that of gentleness and forbearance; we cannot therefore wonder, that under such a banner man has become civilized, and the mildness and delicacy of women have acquired a just influence in softening, purifying and polishing the fierce qualities of his nature. It has been the cruel policy of some Christian people to shut up women in convents, but no where has this destroyed the exalted respect paid to their character. Men have never been made more boisterous and assuming; on the contrary, the spirit of chivalry, if it soon became only an apology for

ridiculous enterprises and bloody combats, has left a name, which has served to denote in all succeeding times the purest degree of knightly virtue.—

—I swear to thee, my friend, by the beards of the seven sages, when I began this letter, I did not intend to lead thee through so many perils by sea and land. But, alas! I am in the land of prosing. Honest James Melville, tells us that ‘Maister John Knox, that maist notable prophet and apostle of our nation,’ was half an hour in the ‘opening up of his text,’ and an ‘an hour and better’ in the application. Maister John probably ‘opened up’ his discourses much better than I have done mine; but if his hearers were willing to forgive him an ‘hour and better’ in the ‘application, it behooveth me to take courage.—There is every circumstance to make the society in Edinburgh interesting. It is not so splendid and so scrupulously free from occasional affectations, as that of the higher classes in London. There is not in Edinburgh that assemblage of ancient and opulent families, which we find in the west end of London, to give a sort of solid, rich and permanent dignity to society, and to put down its little eccentricities, and absurdities. But the New Town, which contains about 30,000 people, is the winter residence of a greater part of the rich families in Scotland. The seat of a University, to which 1800 or 2000 students annully resort, many of them young noblemen and men of fortune, who add something to the gayety, and little to the industry of the place. This is also the portico, in which several of the most distinguished literary men in Great Britain assemble their disciples. There is moreover annually produced here, several bulky poems, besides numerous small effusions, various histories, learned treatises, lots of books of travels, scores of new plays, abundance of journals, reviews, a few novels, editions of black letter and encyclopedias, besides registers, almanacks, catechisms, &c. &c.

The society is then reckoned very literary—it is no pedantry to talk about books—Lord Byron’s ‘monthly muse makes conversation for the next month’s routes—the young men walk up and down the street with an elegant book under their arm instead of a small stick—the character of the place betrays itself in various other symptoms; and while the fashion of some towns is the most approved arrangement of a dinner party or a drawing room, the prevailing fashion of Edinburgh is for literature. Not that this makes

them ceremonious, or takes away a relish for the thousand brilliant trifles and elegancies of life. But nature, which has given these honest Caledonians a country hardly able to raise the common means of subsistence, and producing nothing nearer the fruits of most other climates than a raw turnip, never designed that they should have much wit or humour; nor that they should much abound in the endearing, affectionate qualities of our nature. She has given them tough, inflexible, indefatigable heads, but their hearts are none of the softest or most animated. The Scotch, of the higher classes, however, are among the most hospitable in the world: they are enlightened, well educated, and it is very seldom that the part of the world from which one may happen to come ever creates a look of surprise, or a cool reception. Nationality in the senate may be the highest virtue; but in the drawing room it is the lowest prejudice.

The carnival begins in the middle of January and lasts to the middle of March. This is only two months for the whole year of routes, balls, dinners, theatres, and masquerades; but they thus accumulate into two months all the wit, vivacity, spirit and splendour of the whole twelve; which to some tastes is infinitely more interesting, than to be obliged to grouse through the never-ending winter of a northern climate, by the faint glimmering of an occasional tea party, or a monthly dance, given for the benefit of some young lady. This sort of scattered, straggling dissipation, which lasts for ever, is the necessary consequence of a state of society where people have neither a superfluity of wealth or leisure. But in Edinburgh making parties is a profession, and as making any thing a profession is really half the charm of every thing, these two months pass off with great animation and numberless assemblies. Now the society of Edinburgh is composed entirely of the nobility, men of fortune and professional men; as Edinburgh is not a seaport, gentlemen, who have business, are obliged to live principally at Leith. In this respect the society is a little different from that of London, where merchants and bankers are occasionally found in the ranks of fashion, and also possess considerable influence in Parliament. A greater part of the inhabitants, however, belong to ancient families, and claim to be of that class, whose independent situation in life has doomed them to conjugate the verb *ennuyer* for centuries—‘je* m’ ennuie,

* Thiebauld, *memoires de Frederic*.

tu t'ennuies, il s'ennuie, nous nous ennuyons, vous vous ennuyez, ils s'ennuient,' &c. They have apparently no other duty in this sublunary world, than accomplishing their mind and person—passing a few weeks of the winter in dissipation—the summer in travelling, or at their beautiful castles, and country houses—making a speech in Parliament—buying pictures, and race horses. I know not how many dull volumes of sighs, lamentations, maxims and moral reflections have been thrown away upon the uselessness, vanity and misery of this kind of life. But the worthy victims themselves probably need little of our consolation or compassion, and our sagacious remarks respecting them occasion perhaps about as much gaping and ennui in the world, as they are haunted with themselves. I conceive that we have little to do with the blue or black devils, that may harass the morning meditations of these illustrious personages, and we ought to be contented with seeing them in company animated, elegant, making no bustle, simple, plain, intelligent, well-informed, and without ceremony or affectation.—The universal party here is the 'route.' The house is opened about nine in the evening—people begin to go between ten and eleven, and stay half an hour or an hour; no one sits down, neither are there any of those huge ponderous '*waiters*,' which it will take fifteen men in some degenerate day to raise. The ice creams, &c. are put into a separate room, where there are servants to help, &c. One does not so much notice in these parties the brilliancy of dresses—splendour of furniture, as the total absence of all ceremony. An unhappy trembling youth is not thrust into the middle of a room, encompassed about with rows of stately frowning matrons, and compelled upon pain of excommunication, from the court of the graces and the next party, to make a solemn prostration to each and all. Even the faithful, who enter the temple of the far feared *Vyan-vuyen-huyen* at Aurungabad, are obliged to make only 333 genuflexions, as they pass the threshold. We should be very culpable if we allowed those unhappy heathens to surpass us in the 'ceremonies of the law.' They go to two or three such parties in an evening, and thus contrive to get considerable spirit and animation from the hurry and change of the scene.

But those, to whom the brilliant bagatelle of mere fashionable life is insipid and wearisome, have still a delightful resource in the eminent literary men, that we meet scatter-

ed about in all these crowded routs. It is an idea truly worthy a German annotator of the 'ancient légime,' that literature and science inhabit only convents and colleges, and learned men for ever 'steeping in port and prejudice,' or dozing and mouldering between Greek particles and Hebrew points, must never wander forth from their cells to catch a little of the prosperity, gayety and smile of life, and what is more important, to enlighten and enliven their fellow pilgrims. But it is not only in the cloisters of Cambridge and Oxford that we now meet the learned, and it is no doubt very true that some of the best bred men, and most elegant gentlemen, are among 'the men of letters.' The frequent presence of literary men in society, has had a considerable share in the meritorious undertaking of banishing political discussions. To be sure, the richer classes have few and very few motives for such conversation. They are truly independent in politicks. The infrequency of elections—the almost boundless influence of wealth—and the fixed and unchangeable condition of their own fortunes, of necessity create a comfortable and by no means culpable indifference to the concerns of government, provided nevertheless that the interest of stocks, and rents of land, are regularly paid.

Mr. Playfair, who, I suppose, goes into as many parties as any fashionable young man in the town, is often in the corners of these great crowded rooms. He is now about sixty years old, without any uncommon appearance, except a pair of very intelligent grey eyes, which give his face an expression somewhat like that of our celebrated artist, Stewart. He was originally a clergyman, but from some cause or other he left his parish, and was made a professor in the University here. Mr. Playfair is distinguished for the soundness and accuracy of his knowledge; and besides his writings in the *Edinburgh Review*, which are principally reviews of mathematical works and books of voyages, he published several years since a well known exposition of Dr. Hutton's system of geology, of which school he is considered the head in Edinburgh. He is called the d'Alembert of Edinburgh, and with considerable truth, though probably it is as great a compliment to Mr. Playfair, as to d'Alembert. But after all, the principal charm of Mr. P. is the affectionate simplicity and plainness of his manners, and it is really delightful to see with what an insinuating

mildness and modesty, this dignified, learned and amiable philosopher conducts himself. Mr. Playfair has never been married, and now lives with an unmarried sister.

In another corner, which to be sure must be the 'poet's corner,' we may sometimes find Walter Scott, though he does not much frequent these places. I should think there was no man in this profane world, so often asked after as Walter Scott, and no traveller ever lands in sweet Edinburgh without inquiring where can he be seen? In a small, dark room, where one of the Courts of Sessions is held, there is to be seen every morning in term time, sitting at a little table and keeping the records of the Court, a stout, broad shouldered, brawny and somewhat fleshy man,—with light hair, light complexion, eyes between a blue and a grey, thick nose, round fat face, rather sleepy expression, covered with a ragged black gown, his lame leg stuck under the table, the other sprawling out in such a manner as no leg, lame or not lame, ever ought to be. Such a man, forsooth! as one might swear, heaven had marked out,—as an honest good natured soul, though rather stupid withal,—a most loyal subject, fit to guzzle port and porter, pay taxes, and drink 'God save the King.' Not one poetick line or ray of genius in his face, except a very slight kindling of the eye, to redeem the immortal bust of the author of the *Lay of the last Minstrel*, from the staring, thoughtless, besotted multitude. Mr. Scott is now about forty-five years old, descended from rather an obscure family in Lothian, and when young, he says, that the old men used to take him up on their knees, call him little Watty, and tell him border stories and legendary tales, while his brothers were gone to work; a privilege, which his lameness gave him. Some of those philosophers, who are in the habit of making a 'moral' to all their fables, may very possibly find out, that the world has gained another great poet, because Walter Scott was born with one leg shorter than the other. It may be so.—Walter Scott was married some time since to a Guernsey lady, an illegitimate daughter of the late duke of Devonshire, with whom he was said to have received 10,000*l.* The lady was born in Guernsey, and speaks villanous broken English. Among her virtues is that of unsparing fury against all unfortunate wretches, who criticise her husband's works; and it is said, that when the review of *Marmion* was published in the *Edinburgh Review*, she was very near

boxing the editor's ears at a dinner, where she soon after happened to meet him.

Mr. Scott has also some other blessings, which rarely fall to the fortune of a poet. He is the sheriff of a county, commits to prison, and hangs with great spirit and quite a vulgar dexterity; he is moreover clerk of the court before mentioned. These two situations give him 800 or 1000*l.* a year; besides he had for Marmion 1000 guineas, 2000 for the Lady, and 3000 for Rokeby; and he has also been the editor of several extensive works.

Though Mr. S. is exposed to a constant throng of people with letters of introduction, his houses of resort in Edinburgh are not very numerous, and he confines himself chiefly to some of the choicest of the ministerial party; he is himself zealous to the last ditch for church and king. A disgust with its politicks made him leave the Edinburgh Review, in which he has written some pleasant articles. In his manners he is very mild and agreeable, apparently without any vanity, and the only affectation he has consists in the effort he makes *not* to appear a poet. He has a great deal of humour, and his conversation is principally made up of anecdotes; he is not, however, what they call either elegant or brilliant in company, but then he is cheerful and never obtrusive; upon the whole, one of the last persons you would suspect to be Walter Scott.

Mrs. Grant of Laggan, who is very much known in Old England and in New England by her two first publications, and very little any-where by her two last, is one of those women that the world is willing to call meritorious, to save themselves the trouble of making any inquiries about her; though there are few women, who have so much fancy and an equal power of conversation the first month one is acquainted with her. But the circumstances under which Mrs. Grant introduced herself to the world left no other alternative than to pity and praise. After the death of her husband, she came from the Highlands, where she undoubtedly figured with considerable applause, and brought with her a large family of children—the copy of her ‘Mountain Letters’—a sanguine and persevering spirit withal—a pretty well-informed mind—a hospitable and communicative disposition, and a strong brogue of Scotch English, and Highland Scotch. The eager and extensive circulation of her letters,

however, soon enabled her to establish herself in Edinburgh, where she opened her flat,* invited every body to come and see her, and began to write more books. She was caressed by the first people in London—literary ladies opened a correspondence with her, and hundreds of English came galloping down to Scotland with their silly heads full of the most romantick notions about the Highlands and Mrs. Grant. They expected a beautiful, blooming lass of eighteen, just fresh and simple from the side of the mountains, bounding with life, enthusiasm, hope, poetry and nature. But alas! the pleasures of imagination! The honest souls did not recollect how long since Aunt Schuyler flourished at Albany, and that the amiable lady herself had indulged the publick with American recollections as far back as the year 17—. Mrs. Grant began these recollections when she was only — old; we marvellously fear, that there are few young ladies in our ‘degenerate’ day, who have such precious good judgments and memories.

Mrs. Grant’s strong hold is conversation; she certainly talks with uncommon vivacity, and has that rare faculty of bounding forth from a dangerous height, and when most others would sink, she soars on triumphantly to the end of the sentence. But then she has only three subjects, the life and adventures of Mrs. Anne Grant of Laggan, the beautiful lochs, vales, &c. of the Highlands, and the greatness of the British nation. These dishes, the way she serves them up, are very charming the first four or five weeks. But you know, that the emperour Domitian said, that one could not eat larks’ tongues for ever. Mrs. Grant by no means visits the first society in Edinburgh, and, however unwilling one may be to confess it, her literary reputation in particular is not brilliant, and hardly corresponds with the estimation in which she is held in some parts of New-England. But here again her good fortune has procured her zealous and enlightened friends, and it may be my bad fortune, to excite a slight murmur among them by the less than common rapture with which I have mentioned Mrs. Grant. She appears, however, to be aware of the patronage she has received, and her attentions to all Americans, who are made known to her, are very constant and of the kindest description.

* Flat is one story. Many of the houses in Edinburgh are built with a publick entry like a barrack; and different families live on the different stories.

It gives me the greatest pleasure to speak to you of Mr. Alison—one of the most amiable and pleasant of men, whose feelings and taste are equally pure. He has been settled for several years as the first minister of the Episcopal Chapel in this place; and certainly for the elegant, mild and persuasive eloquence of his sermons and manner, he has here no equal. Mr. Alison was born in Scotland, though educated in England, where he had the good fortune to stay long enough to lose the greater part of his Scotch dialect. He is married to a very amiable and intelligent lady, the adopted daughter of the late Mrs. Montagu whose letters have lately been published, with whom she lived many years, and therefore saw in her house both in London and Paris, the most celebrated of the time in which she flourished. This circumstance makes her one of the most delightful companions, and if one can be contented without crowds and large rooms and splendid furniture, I know of no place in Edinburgh, where we may find so much rational and unfailling enjoyment. The society which frequent their house is select, refined and accomplished, and their table furnishes the true '*cæna deorum*,'—the society of men of talents and learning, who are capable in their closets of the severest study and inquiry, and yet in publick understand and practise all the elegancies and pleasantries of society. Mr. Alison is visited in the most intimate manner by the best people in Edinburgh, and his own charming manners have such an influence, that every one is divested in his presence of whatever they may have of vanity, pride or conceit. If we wish to have the choicest conversation of the best educated and best bred men, if we would pour from flasks sealed up in the reign of Augustus, we must come to his table. They have an interesting family, settled, or about to be settled, in the world. Mr. Alison is of course well known among us by his Essay on Taste, &c.* He has never written in any periodical work, as I am told—though he is now engaged to furnish something for the edition of the Encyclopedia, edited and published by A. Constable of this place.

In another letter I will endeavour to give you some farther account of the society, literary factions, &c.

* A volume of Sermons by him has lately been re-published in Boston.